

A. G. Jenkins 18

Back on the Campaign Trail

by CONGRESSMAN
KEN KECHELER

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a series of articles on Kentucky's political scene. General Jenkins, who was born and brought up in Greenbrier, and is buried in Spring Hill Cemetery in Huntington.)

With the adjournment of the House of Representatives on March 3, 1859, and the farewell address by Speaker Orr to the members, Congressman Jenkins hurried westward to start his campaign for re-election.

On the day after Congress adjourned, the Democratic Congressional Convention assembled in Parkersburg. It was Samuel Crane of far-off Randolph County who presented Congressman Jenkins' name for renomination. The official convention reports state that Crane "bore testimony to Jenkins' high moral worth, his private virtues, and his unblemished public acts, making him well deserving of the honor." There were loud calls for William L. Jackson of Wood County, who promptly seconded the nomination of Congressman Jenkins, endorsing him "as a man and as a politician." F. P. Turner then moved that the nomination be made unanimous, which was accomplished "amidst loud and long-continued cheers."

What a contrast the 1859 Congressional nomination was from the long-drawn-out, bitter, multi-ballot struggle of 1857 when Jenkins was nominated at Parkersburg!

The Congressman hurried to reach the convention, and managed to reach Parkersburg by March 5 after hard riding. He immediately dispatched the following letter to his convention friends:

Parkersburg, March 5, 1859
"Gentlemen:

"On my arrival here, your letter was placed in my hands, apprising me that I had been nominated by acclamation, to represent this District in the next Congress. This renewed manifestation of your confidence and favor, and its con-

sequent endorsement of my political course, is deeply gratifying to my feelings.

"In accepting the nomination, I beg to return to the convention the expression of my full appreciation of their kind and flattering compliment and to yourselves my thanks for the courteous manner in which you have been pleased to communicate the same.

A. G. Jenkins"

In reporting Congressman Jenkins's renomination, the Barbour Jeffersonian stated: "Mr. Jenkins has made an honest, capable and most excellent Representative. He deserves, and no doubt receives, the universal commendation of his constituents. Although one of the youngest Members of the House, he bears a reputation for ability, eloquence and firmness to Democratic principles of which much older men might be proud. He is one of the working Members of Congress, and his constituents from every part of the district can testify to that fact."

On Defensive

Congressman Jenkins and his bride of less than a year arrived in Charleston on March 22, and addressed a meeting at the Kanawha County Courthouse. The meeting opened at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and the Congressman went somewhat on the defensive in his opening speech. He defended the public expenditures of the Buchanan Administration and claimed, "The Democratic Party has done all that a party could do to check the extravagances of a combined opposition in Congress."

Running against Congressman Jenkins in 1859 was a well-respected Charleston lawyer named James Madison Laidley, the nephew of one of the leading spirits in the founding of Marshall Academy, John Laidley (after whom Laidley Hall at Marshall University is named.)

Laidley was a different kind of an opponent than Carlile had

been in 1857. The Kanawha Valley Star, while friendly to Congressman Jenkins, noted that Mr. Laidley, although a bitter foe of Democracy, is considered a gentleman of honor and integrity. Laidley opened his campaign in Putnam County with an address of one and one-half hours, in which he denounced Democratic waste and extravagance, pointing out the expense of equipping the Capitol Building and the Speaker's Office.

Debate Challenge

Laidley also challenged Congressman Jenkins to a series of debates, to which the Congressman courteously replied early in April, 1859, aboard the Ohio River steamer A. W. Quarrier:

"Your favor of the 2nd inst., announcing your intention to become my competitor to represent this district in the next Congress, was placed in my hand a few minutes ago, on my coming aboard from Point Pleasant, where I had been addressing the people. I need not assure you that I most heartily reciprocate the courteous sentiments expressed in your letter relative to the manner in which the canvass between us should be conducted.

"I regret very much that you could not apprise me distinctly of the times and places at which you propose to address the people, as I should have been much pleased to be present, but as you cannot do so definitely I will make the following appointments, which I

will make. Your appointments are: These appointments you may consider in addition:

Parkersburg — April 23
Clarksburg — April 16
Gilmer County — April 21
Calhoun Cy. — April 23
Doddridge Cy. — April 25
Wirt County — April 28
Jackson Cy. — May 3

"From this point we can agree on other appointments.

"Hoping it may suit your convenience to attend such appointments, I am in great haste,

Yours truly,
A. G. Jenkins"

Congressman Jenkins made good progress in the upper end of the 11th Congressional District, which comprised 19 counties.

The Parkersburg News reported on his Wood County Courthouse address in glowing terms:

"The speech of the Honorable A. G. Jenkins, delivered in this place on Monday last, was a very able effort. Its reasoning was fair, conclusive and statesmanlike, the ideas were good and clearly expressed, while the language was always appropriate and well-chosen, and sometimes eloquent. We have since heard the opinion repeatedly expressed, both by political friends and opponents, that this last effort of our candidate was superior to any made by him previously in this place. It was unquestionably a masterly defense of the Democratic Party and its principles, and a complete refutation of

the charges made by the opposition."

Once Parkersburg had been conquered, Congressman Jenkins moved on to Clarksburg. He arrived in the Harrison County seat on a Monday evening, and was met by the Clarksburg Band and Glee Club, which gave a rousing salute to his arrival. The Congressman proceeded to his quarters at the Northwestern hotel, where he was serenaded by the band and glee club, and responded with a short speech returning his thanks for the compliments thus paid him. The Congressman then went on a handshaking tour on Monday, returning to the Harrison County Courthouse on Tuesday afternoon to address an overflow crowd for an hour and three-quarters.

Although he sensed the tide was running with him a month before the election, Congressman Jenkins did not let up in his strenuous campaign schedule. Once again it was "Plan as though I will live forever, and live as though I will die tomorrow."

(To be Continued)